RAJYA SABHA

Thursday, the 21st November, 2002/30 Kartika, 1924 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock,
MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Emission of Radiation

*41. SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item which appeared in 'The Hindustan Times' dated 14th October, 2002 under the caption Indian N-reactors emit more radiation: Report;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether it is also a fact that measures to contain emission of radiation in the country's nuclear reactors have not been adopted merely because it involves huge cost;

(d) if so, the estimated cost for upgradation of safety measures in the atomic plants; and

(e) what are the details of radiation-related mishaps in the country during the last five years involving the nuclear plant workers and others?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ATOMIC ENERGY (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) to (e) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) The Government is aware of the said news-report.

(b) The radioactive releases from the Nuclear Power Stations to the environment are well within the limits prescribed by the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB). The radiation dose to workers also indicates near total compliance with the limits prescribed by AERB.

(c) No, Sir. Safety requirements have been met regardless of cost considerations.

(d) Not applicable.

(e) During the last 5 years not a single case of radiation-related mishap involving nuclear power plant workers and others occurred in India.

SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Sir, at the very outset, I submit that the answer is not satisfactory. ...(*Interruptions*).. It has revealed nothing but has concealed everything. Sir, we have a Chairman for the Atomic Energy Commission and a Chairman for monitoring the implementation as well as the maintenance of all these atomic nuclear units. The Chairman of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board has made a statement, a public statement, saying that Kakrapara Atomic Power Station in Gujarat is a prized one but the radiation emitting from its reactors is as much as three times more than the international norms. That means there are other nuclear plants. We have got 14 nuclear plants in the country. The other nuclear plants are not up to the standard. They are even much worse than the Kakrapara Atomic Power Station. Sir, some scientists have been saying that these plants are so poorly built and maintained that a Chernobyl type disaster may be just a matter of time. Further they have stated that many of our nuclear plants/installations have aged with time and have serious problems which are characteristics of an early vintage design. I do not know whether these facts have been brought to the notice of the hon. Prime Minister. If at all these facts had been brought to the notice of the hon. Prime Minister, he would not have concealed anything from the nation. I am dead sure of it. Now the question is, we have seen the gas tragedy of Bhopal. We have also seen the results of this tragedy. Here what they have said is that a danger to the nation is not from Pakistan and terrorists, but that danger to the nation is from these nuclear plants which have become defective and a danger is emitting from these units. ...(*Interruptions*)..

DR. ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR: Sir, I have a clarification to seek. ...(*Interruptions*).. Is it a debate or Question Hour? ...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: It is not a debate ...(*Interruptions*)... Please excuse me. Sir, the first nuclear plant which was in your State ...(*Interruptions*)...

श्री सभापति: आप सीधा प्रश्न पूछिए। यह सब "हिन्दुस्तान टाइम्स" में अपीयर्ड हो चुका है। इसलिए आप सीधा प्रश्न कर लीजिए जो करना है।

SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Sir, I am going to put my question. ...(*Interruptions*)... Sir, the nuclear plant which was started in your State was closed because of defects. I would like to know whether the hon. Prime Minister is aware of all these facts and instead of concealing facts some corrective measures have been taken. I would also like to know whether the hon. Prime Minister is going to make a categorical statement that we are not going to make any compromise so far as safety is concerned. Is he going to assure the nation and the entire international community that there will not be any danger from the nuclear reactors of the country?

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: Sir, this question is based on a news-item which appeared in the ***Hindustan Times***, dated 14th October, 2002. It is also from a Report which appeared in the ***Times of India*** of the same day. But the source of this question is the Crystal Science Monitor where it appeared many days ago. I would like to bring to everyone's notice and we need to take into account the fact that both these reported incidents in the ***Hindustan Times*** and in the ***Times of India*** have happened, actually, nineteen months apart and twenty-one months ago. I would like to point out that the Report was made by the Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission at the 46th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency, in September, 2002, in Vienna. And, the other one was made by the Chairman, Atomic Regulatory Board, on February 20, 2001, while addressing the International Conference on Radiation Protection Dosimetry at Mumbai.

I would like to clarify, first of all, what the parameters for ensuring safety are. Sir, universally accepted parameter, here, is based on the individual dose limit. We are talking about the collective dose limits. This is mandatory. There are dose limits which are prescribed by the AERB for the individual workers as well as for the members of the public. These limits are extremely stringent—30 Milli Sieverts per annum per worker here, in India, vis-a-vis 50 Milli Sieverts as prescribed by the International Commission on Radiological Protection. It is an international body. In addition, we have said—it says 50 Milli Sieverts per year—that in five years do not want to go over 100 Milli Sieverts. This is for the safety and

protection of our people and our workers. We have also said that 1 Milli Sieverts per annum is the limit for the public. There has, absolutely, been near total compliance with the limits by all the nuclear power plants and our nuclear power plants are perfectly safe.

When the statement was made, it was, basically, not to do with individual radiation exposure but the collective dose and what we are looking at is to increase the best practices because the mandatory procedures are, actually, to do with only the individual dose limit.

As far as the second statement made by the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commision is concerned, I would like to submit that this statement has been misquoted. He has linked safety with technology and never with costs. This was a statement that was made in Vienna. I want to make it absolutely clear here that the safety of our workers is of paramount importance to us and, there will be, absolutely, no compromise on this issue. But to just clarify the issue I would just explain what the events are on the International Atomic Energy Agency or the International Nuclear Events Scale. This Scale has seven points. The events of the level of zero have no safety significance; events of the level one are anomalies; events of the level between 2-3 are incidents; and events, which are rated between 4-7, are classified as accidents or mishaps. I would like to inform the House and, actually, congratulate our people working with the atomic energy that in 200 reactor-years of operation in India, there has been absolutely no accident. The fire incident that took place at Narora was at a level of 3 points which was much below the classification of 4-7 points. There have been a few events of the level of 2 points and there have been minor events in the range of 0-1 points, which, in the international Scale of events, do not matter at all. There is only one problem over here and that, I think, is that of public perception. Now, this is also slowly beginning to change and, I believe, that as far as safety is concerned, there will be no compromise at all. Thank you.

SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Sir, unfortunately, the hon. Minister is not telling the truth. The Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission, had clearly stated that the real problem was the new technology, designed to upgrade safety of power plants, is expensive for a developing country like India. He had further stated that, according to him, India should not be held accountable in regard to the international standards, until the international community makes available such

technology to the developing countries, safety and technology cannot be divorced. I would like to know whether this statement has been contradicted by you or not. The hon. Minister says, He had been misquoted. In that case, you could have contradicted it. It comes under the Official Secrets' Act. If at all something wrong was stated in public, they could have taken action against those people.

The second part of my supplementary is this. Our Prime Minister...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Poojary, you should come straight to your supplementary.

SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Yes, Sir, I am coming to the point. If I remember correctly, it was only during the two visits abroad made by the hon. Prime Minister, one in September, 2001, and another in October, 2002, his team discussed these aspects. I don't know the details about it. It is for the hon. Prime Minister to enlighten the House and the nation, as to what transpired during these visits. He had made a categorical statement in Mumbai, in October, 2002, that we were appealing to the international community to cooperate with India for running nuclear power units in the country and it might be a joint venture also. He had stated that we were ready for an open examination to find out the standards of these units. He had given a commitment to the nation that Government was going to generate 20 megawatts of power by 2002. May I know from the Prime Minister whether he stands by that commitment? I would also like to know whether he is going to assure the House and the nation that we are going to generate power, as per the assurance given by him. I want the hon. Prime Minister to respond to this instead of leaving to his deputy.

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: Sir, this does not form part of the question. This question relates to the safety of the power plants and the hon. Member wants to know about the statements made by the Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission, and the hon. Prime Minister. He can give a notice, and I will be happy to give any information he requires.

SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: The hon. Prime Minister had made a statement in Mumbai, and don't you know about it? It has come in all the newspapers. ...(*Interruptions*).. He is sitting here, you can ask him. ...(*Interruptions*)... Your senior is sitting here.

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: Mr. Chairman, Sir, whether it is correct or not; doubts have been expressed about the safety of some of our nuclear plants in this country. I recall, some years ago, the former Chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Board,—*if I remember correctly*,— Dr. Gopalakrishnan, himself had raised these matters. Sir, I don't want to go into the specifics of the question. But in order to generate the fullest possible confidence about the safety of our nuclear installations, will the hon. Prime Minister consider ensuring that the Nuclear Regulatory Board is independent of the Department of the Atomic Energy and the Atomic Energy Commission? As of now, I think, this Board is not truly independent. And, therefore, I think there is a danger that sometimes, the safety concerns may not receive the priority attention that they deserve.

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: Sir, functionally, at the moment, it is autonomous. You mentioned about the safety conditions. I would like to say that periodic inspections were carried out. There were 134 safety issues which were identified. But all these have been taken care of. There are ten issues that are pending, and the implementation on these is progressing very satisfactorily. But, besides this, there are many technical and sound mechanisms for ensuring safety of the workers and the public. I can quickly go through them, if required. But, basically, all *the activities—its design, its exclusion zone, its stringent quality assurance* programme, multi-tier system review, regulation of the environment, as per the limits stipulated by the AERB—are performed by well-trained staff. The environment survey labs are set up at each of the operating stations and checked out 30 kiometres around the plant. As per the international practice, safety reviews are organised every nine years to assess the safety of the systems and the remaining useful life of the plants.

DR. RAJA RAMANNA: Mr. Chairman, first of all, I would like to say that this question of denigrating nuclear activities comes periodically from some foreign countries. The main reason being that, people want to discourage nuclear power not because it is not a useful and effective form to meet our needs, but, essentially, because it becomes a source for making nuclear weapons. Therefore, we should take the statements,

which appear in the newspapers, in their proper perspective. The second aspect is that, at the moment, all our reactors are working at a capacity factor which has never been reached before, that is, above 80 per cent or 90 per cent. But, if there is any danger of leakages, I am afraid, we will not be able to keep our reactors working at these high levels. Yes; it is true. I myself was a Member of the Safety Committee. It was set up to make this body as independent as possible, so that it directly reports to the Prime Minister. And, it has been done that way. It periodically announces all the possible faults that could come—not the real faults, but the possible faults—so that the safety of such systems is improved. With new materials, with new electronic systems, with new checking systems, and with the distances from the reactors to the public, the capacity of nuclear power is also increasing. Therefore, such reports as have appeared in the "Christian Science Monitor' should not be taken too seriously, because it will only give importance to somebody who wants to be nasty to us.

SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I must say that, for this issue, there is no need for a false scare, but, at the same time, there should be no complacence. There has to be some balance. It should not create any false scare, as long as the power plants are safe. I fully agree with what Dr. Raja Ramanna has said. But there should not be any complacence because, as far as I remember, the same issue was raised by Dr. Manmohan Singh four or five years ago, quoting the comments of the then or retired Chairman of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, which is supposed to oversee the safety of the atomic power plants and atomic installations. At that time also, the same question was raised: how independent the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board is. When such questions have come in, there has to be a transparent mechanism. I would request the Government—rather I would suggest because I know the Leader of the House, when he was the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Energy, taking interest,—that in case, some secrecy is involved, the report of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, the aspects mentioned by Dr. Gopalkrishnan—could be looked into by, say, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leaders of the various Parties and atomic scientists like Dr. Raja Ramanna. Let those recommendations, and the points which have been raised by the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board be studied in camera by the leaders of the political parties, including specialists like

Dr. Raja Ramanna. Let it be cleared once and for all, and there should not be any sense of false scare. But, as far as the safety is concerned, capital is a problem, the technology is a problem. Let it be looked into by a select parliamentary body, as I have requested just now. Sir, my question is: Would the Government look into this issue? This question has been raised by a lot of eminent people in the country. I mean, the Regulatory Board Chief himself has said that it is really not an independent body. So, would the Government look into this suggestion of mine?

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: Sir, this is a ...

DR. RAJA RAMANNA: Sir, if you would permit me, I would say that Mr. Gopal Krishnan had gone to the court, and, therefore, I do not think that when the court is dealing with it and it has come out with reports on it, we should ask the Prime Minister to make a comment on it. But all that I would say is that the complaints of Mr. Gopal Krishnan are vague. We do have large organisations where we have such people who will say things when it does not suit them ...(*Interruptions*)... They are all available.

SHRI KAPIL SIBAL: Sir, the hon. Member should not cast aspersions against a person who is not present in the House. ...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Sir, he need not answer. The Prime Minister is competent enough to reply to that ...(*Interruptions*)... Why is the hon. Member allowed to speak? ...(*Interruptions*)... He should not comment on it... (*Interruptions*)...

DR. RAJA RAMANNA: Sir, I am commenting on the fact ...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE: Sir, Parliament is supreme. Parliament is not subservient to the courts. Parliament is supreme. I do not think we are subservient to anybody. If we want, if Parliament wants, these things can be discussed. It is a national issue. If the Prime Minister wants, let us have a discussion in Parliament. ...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI HANSRAJ BHARDWAJ: Sir, the Member cannot reply on behalf of the Minister. The Minister has to reply ...(*Interruptions*)... The Minister must reply...(*Interruptions*)... Don't denigrate the Parliament ...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE: Sir, I would request the Prime Minister to say that the power plants are safe. Let if be discussed by Parliament, by the Party leaders. I do not think there is anything wrong in it. Let us go into the points raised by the independent Regulatory Board.

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: Sir, this is a suggestion for action, and the Government will consider it seriously.

National Highways in Assam

*42. SHRI DRUPAD BORGOHAIN: Will the Minister of ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) the action taken by his Ministry to repair and improve the National Highways of Assam which are badly damaged by flood and for other reasons;

(b) whether any amount has been released to Assam Government for this purpose; and

(c) if so, whether the utilisation has started?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (MAJOR GENERAL (RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI): (a) Improvement of National Highways in Assam is done by three agencies, viz. the Assam PWD, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI). During the last 4 years, in order to improve the conditions of the National Highways in the State, the allocations and expenditure are as follows:—

(Rs. in crore)

Year	Allocation	Expenditure
1999-2000	99.16	77.47
2000-2001	136.26	116.81
2001-2002	158.73	157.33
2002-2003	132.74	60.64*